R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 015 946 TE 500 014

REFLECTIONS ON "THE COLLEGE TEACHING OF ENGLISH."

BY- SHARPLESS, F. FARVIN

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENG.,CHAMPAIGN,ILL

PUB DATE OCT 67

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.44 9P.

DESCRIPTORS- *CULTURAL ENRICHMENT, *ENGLISH, *HIGHER EDUCATION, *ENGLISH INSTRUCTION, *INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT, LITERARY DISCRIMINATION, LITERATURE, HUMANITIES, TEACHING METHODS, ENGLISH CURRICULUM, TEACHER IMPROVEMENT, CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT, PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT, CURRICULUM PLANNING,

THE DISCUSSION IN THIS EXTENSIVE CRITICAL REVIEW OF "THE COLLEGE TEACHING OF ENGLISH" (NCTE CURRICULUM SERIES, 1965) INCLUDES NOT ONLY AN APPRAISAL OF THE BOOK BUT ALSO A CRITICISM OF TEACHERS AND SCHOLARS WHO FAIL TO CONSIDER THE THEORETICAL ORIENTATION OF THEIR PROFESSION. THE NATURE OF REALITY AND THE PURPOSE OF TEACHING, FOR EXAMPLE, ARE VIEWED DIFFERENTLY BY THE "TRADITIONALIST," THE "LIBERAL," OR THE "SNOPESIAN CAREERIST." CATEGORIES SUCH AS THESE FOCUS ATTENTION ON THE PREMISES AND ASSUMPTIONS BEHIND JUDGMENTS MADE BY TEACHERS AND CRITICS OF LITERATURE WHICH MUST BE UNDERSTOOD AND CONSIDERED IN ANY PROGRAM OF REFORM. THIS IS WHY THE VOLUME OF PREDOMINANTLY TRADITIONALIST ESSAYS ON THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH IS DISAPPOINTING, ESPECIALLY IN THE ABSENCE OF A CHAPTER DEVOTED TO STUDENTS. MOST OF THE AUTHORS INCLUDED FAIL TO CONSIDER THE BASIC QUESTIONS OF WHAT THE STUDY OF LITERATURE IS, WHAT IT CAN ACCOMPLISH, AND HOW THESE GOALS MAY BE BEST REALIZED. WAYNE C. BOOTH'S DISCUSSION OF "THE UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM" AND MURRAY KRIEGER'S "THE DISCIPLINE OF LITERARY CRITICISM" ARE NOTABLE EXCEPTIONS. ROGER MCCUTCHEON'S VIEWS, HOWEVER, REPRESENT THE OLD TRADITIONALIST SCHOOL WHICH ADVOCATES OFTEN TEDIOUS BIBLIOGRAPHIC WORK AND ENCYCLOPEDIC KNOWLEDGE. THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN "COLLEGE ENGLISH," VOLUME 29, NUMBER 1, OCTOBER 1967, PAGES 32-39. (BN)

ED015946

COLLEGE ENGLISH

Volume 29 OCTOBER 1967 Number 1

PERSPECTIVES on the TEACHING of LITERATURE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

TE 500 014

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY National Council of Teachers of English TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE U.S. OFFICE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

SUBSCRIPTIONS

College English is published monthly October through May by the National Council of Teachers of English, 508 South Sixth Street, Champaign, Illinois 61820. Subscription rate $7.00 per year. Single copy $1.00. Postage is prepaid on all orders for the United States (and all other countries with the same postage rates). Extra postage is charged for Canada and for all other countries in the Postal Union at the rate of 48 cents per annual subscription (total $7.48). Remittances should be made payable to the NCTE by check, money order, or bank draft. Communications regarding orders, subscriptions, single copies, and advertising should be addressed to the NCTE, 508 South Sixth Street, Champaign, Illinois 61820. Second-class postage paid at Danville, Illinois, and at Champaign, Illinois. Copyright, 1967, by the National Council of Teachers of English. Printed in the U.S.A.

Reflections on *The College Teaching of English*

F. Parvin Sharpless

To speculate upon the confusion surrounding the teaching of literature is to be driven to ask why the activities of a profession boasting so many sensitive and intelligent people should be so carelessly and illogically carried out; why, where objectivity of judgment is praised, ruthless partisanship should prevail; why humanists attack each other with so little humanity. Contradictions such as these suggest the too common and too human willingness to ignore principles upon which action depends, to prefer continuing the accustomed until challenged. Rarely do teachers and scholars think about the theoretical orientation of their study, and even less often about its orientation to others. Pitched battles are fought from unknown and untested positions. Old ideas and their accompanying institutions flourish beyond their time, protecting their emperors and citizens alike from knowledge which would allow them to know if they were clothed or naked.

What is needed is some general anatomy of the profession of literature which will give broad classifications of both practice and the principles of practice. Such an account would have the advantage of directing our attention where it so rarely falls, on the metaphysics, the premises, and the assumptions of the teacher-critic. Nor are general categories difficult to find, and they reveal a surprising degree of consistency. Examining them, we can see that attitudes toward literature, toward teaching, toward students, are based upon attitudes toward life, toward larger value questions. Answers to big questions, whether consciously obtained or not, indicate modes of proceeding from day to day, and in a thoughtful person, govern actions both great and small.

For example, if one believes that reality is external, made up of real physical objects that can be weighed, measured, and manipulated, then it follows that knowledge will be seen to consist of the possession in the mind of patterns and categories of fact about these objects, structuring the confusion of matter; if one believes that knowledge reduces chaos by rendering the mass of data presented by the external world (space) and the process of history (time) into order and design, then it follows that one will teach "facts" and admire large categorical generalizations. Similarly, if one's view of human nature is that it is weak, undisciplined, given to vanity and pride, then he will see it to require external restraints, the imposition of forms from above, the submission of the self to appropriate authority: the past, tradition, the father, or God.

In the classroom these premises lead to authoritarian and prescriptive teaching, and to a fixed and rigid curriculum. The teacher's authority, both intellectual and social, is based upon his superior age, experience, and accumulation of knowledge; his function to transfer his order to the minds of his students. They will be expected to resist, to be weak and naturally undisciplined, requiring coercion in the form of deadlines for assignments, and check quizzes stressing factual con-

F. Parvin Sharpless has recently left Goucher College to become Head of the English Department at Germantown Friends School in Philadelphia. His field of special interest is the nineteenth century.

tent. He will favor lecture periods rather than discussion on the ground that his acquirements and skills suggest that he should talk and others listen. By the same token he will be unimpressed with students' ideas, believing that opinions are more appropriate to those whose experience and knowledge will support them.

As put into practice by university and college departments of literature, such attitudes have accompanying aesthetic and critical formulations. As a critic, the traditionalist values work according to the authority of the past, he admires artists that the past has admired, about whose work there is a large body of traditional scholarship. He teaches what his teachers have taught, and often has deep admiration for those whose learning he has inherited. He feels that major questions of taste and judgment are beyond argument, having been "settled" by the testimony of history and by the existence of a traditional answer. The writers he most values will share a traditional faith in God and an acceptance of Christian orthodoxy on major points; they will possess a formalized art, especially verbal elegance, decorum, "style," and adherence to rules and genre categories; they will concern themselves in subject with the inner working of cultivated social milieux, and with man's susceptibility to self-delusion, vanity, and hypocrisy. For the first attribute he values Chaucer, Milton, Wordsworth, and Eliot; for the second, Dryden, Pope, Jane Austen, and Henry James; for the third, Pope, Austen, James, and Conrad.

Because his religious orthodoxy provides answers to doctrinal questions, the traditionalist critic is less interested in substantive aspects of content, preferring to deal with formal matters of structure, or of language, or of history. His object is to assert the work's stature, to define its place in a historical tradition, to give the work life and relevance by associating it with social, cultural, or historical categories, and, in all these respects, to deny critical relativity. To these ends he prefers older literature arising from a more religious time than our own, because it is accompanied by a greater weight of traditional scholarship and opinion, and because it requires for understanding a greater number of historical and interpretative data, data which he possesses and of which his students are ignorant. Similarly he often values philology and textual criticism because these also require professional expertise, and aim to fix the work beyond time and change.

Because he believes that society controls man's "natural" wildness, because he believes that a social setting gives man a particular location and identity, because he works hard and within the existing forms and conventions, because he is a keen observer of the manners and degrees of his social environment, the traditionalist often possesses great skill in social and political matters, and is often a gifted administrator. These qualities frequently bring him to power and contribute thereby to the general conservatism of institutions. As a chairman or dean he upholds the best of traditional modes, ideas, and values. He provides a paternal discipline for junior members of his department. He thinks publication a necessity as much for its discipline as for its content. He places value upon the badges and insignia of office and rank: degrees, awards, years of service; he does not approve of shortcuts, nor of too rapid advancement. He has a sense of loyalty and of obligation and of duty. Seniority, preferment, ease, must be earned.

The opposite point of view is already implied. It begins with contrary premises. Reality, first of all, is not external, but in the mind; the external world of things is in constant change and movement, and definition of it is by necessity a projection of the individual conscious-

ness. Man is naturally good, or a neutral blank slate subject to either good or bad environment. Original Sin, if it exists at all, is not individual, but social. Evil is outside, a set of circumstances, not a psychic blot.

From these premises arises a kind of existential pedagogy. To learn is to develop, to become, to fulfill one's potential, and the means to these ends are not discipline and restraint, but freedom, encouragement, love. Under these terms the teacher neither lectures nor prescribes, because his 'truth' is experiential, growing out of situation and context, out of the crossing in time of teacher, student, and work of art. In his students and in himself he values originality, imagination, and evidence of growth. In the classroom he values engagement; his aim is to unsettle the perceptual pattern of the student, but not to prescribe a new one. In his teaching he may discard all lecture notes or prepared outlines, coming to class with a detailed grasp of the work at hand, derived from fresh study of it, and with his intellect and sensibilities open and receptive to what will happen. He considers that only when students are involved in a kind of spontaneous excitement of learning will the class justify itself. He thinks similarly that one's knowledge of a work of art can grow indefinitely even as one's personality and experience grow, and he is most depressed when, upon rereading a work, he finds himself thinking the same things that he thought last year.

The dangers in this point of view are that classes may disintegrate into chaos. Many students prefer and some require prescriptive teaching, and finding his classes disturbing they respond with hostility. There is a Faustian temptation to ego and vanity which may lead to error, and which will divorce him from the minds of others and isolate him inside his selfconsciousness.

The critical position which this view suggests is, to a large extent, relativist. It believes that time and the flux of change compromise all values, moral and religious as well as literary and aesthetic. The observer and the object are in a ceaseless flow of motion and the work of art changes as those who read and respond to it change; a great work is one which can be meaningfully understood by succeeding ages. (From this essential relativity the romantic may be able to salvage his own personality with its unique perceptions, its particular powers of organization and projection. He may also find a transcendental truth, an extra-historical "humanity," a wisdom of the heart, which go beyond the relativity of the mind.) As a critic the holder of these views, while acknowledging the importance of formal considerations, will prefer to concentrate on content. Because he has no dogma or orthodoxy of his own he has a greater need to know what kind of truth and answers the work itself, the vision it contains, may provide. Finally he is usually more congenial to eccentric heterodoxy than to caution. His literary canon includes Blake, Keats, Shelley, Dickens, Yeats, and Thomas.

At his best the traditionalist is a disciplined, articulate preserver of the highest tastes and accomplishments of our culture, setting forth the evidence of man's intellectual and aesthetic control of his environment and of himself. At his worst he is an autocratic pedant, concealing insecurity, weakness, and distrust of life behind political power and social elaboration. The liberal, at his worst, is foolish, vain, egotistical, disorganized, relativistic, and empty. At his best he is an upholder of the free mind and spirit, a believer in the ability of man to live and grow, in man's capacity for meeting change and challenge, a lover of the world for its problems, and of man for his knowledge and possibility.

The ideal relation between these two would seem to be mutual respect, an

agreement to disagree, because although no compromise is individually possible, they do share a vital assumption: both hold that literature is valuable as an agency of human insight and knowledge. They may disagree on the content of that insight, and indeed even on the epistemology appropriate to it, but they both take literature seriously, and find value in it.

They also share a common enemy whose ascent to power is sufficient reason in itself for them to put aside their differences. He is the opportunist, the hustler, the operator, the Snopesian careerist, the "pro." He does not believe in literature, or teaching, or the life of the mind, but only in himself, in success, in rising, climbing, in money, power, in "making it." He sees literature as only a means to these ends. As a critic he is the bad fruit of the New Criticism, taking "close reading" as an excuse for a valueless and sterile show of ingenuity which avoids all substantive questions. As a teacher he may be good with elementary levels of instruction in the techniques of reading, but lacking any "belief," he cannot shape a course around any idea or concept, nor develop a critical theory of any depth or complexity. Students often complain that he is doing the same thing in the last week of the term that he was doing in the first. He dislikes teaching, however, because it is the least efficient way to succeed, and keeps him from more productive and "visible" enterprises, particularly publication.

The careerist is successful because he recognizes the realities of the system, particularly the use of the quantity rather than the quality of publication as a means of advancement. The traditionalist writes careful and precise scholarship, usually requiring considerable factual depth of learning, and the sifting of data and detail, and usually dealing with more or less verifiable matters of history, text, or social background. The modernist publishes less; he does not as a rule like close research except in primary sources, he is not painstaking and sometimes is impatient of detail. He likes large ideas of broad significance. His work tends to be original, comprehensive, sometimes profound and sometimes cloudy. The careerist outdoes both because the method of close reading can be applied superficially to any work, and requires little in the way of factual background or secondary involvement. And, being ambitious, he works hard. His success is due also to the fact that the traditionalist who is usually in charge is obliged to accept him professionally because the traditionalist respects work and the rules of the game, and the careerist plays by the letter at least of these prescriptions.

These rough categories focus our attention where it is so rarely placed, on the assumptions and premises behind the activities and judgments which teachers and critics of literature of all persuasions make. It is here that any program of reform for the confusion of our present practice must begin. We may hope to straighten ourselves out, to understand what is wrong, only if we understand why we do as we do, how we come to approve what we approve and condemn its opposite. And it is here also that the volume of essays *The College Teaching of English* is disappointing.[1] It is not merely that the book represents a predominantly traditionalist view; nor that much of it is given to historical accounts of the development of literary studies and to surveys of present practice; nor that many of these are out of date by ten years or more. These are not so serious limitations as the failure of all but

[1] Edited by John C. Gerber with John H. Fisher and Curt A. Zimansky as associate editors (Appleton, Century, Crofts, 1965). The fourth and final volume in the NCTE Curriculum Series, sponsored by NCTE, MLA, CEA, and ASA.

a few of the writers in this volume to give any attention even indirectly to the basic questions of what the study of literature is, what it can accomplish, and how these goals may be best realized.

There are a few exceptions, however, which by their forthrightness and insight and boldness redeem the rest. One is the discussion by Wayne C. Booth of "The Undergraduate Program." Booth asserts that most undergraduate programs in literature are structured about no theoretical conception whatsoever, either of the nature of literature or of education. Because makers of programs cannot agree on a single set of principles they have settled for what Booth terms "a loose collection of any of a dozen or so subjects, available for sampling in any conceivable order, to the end of accumulating a pile of credits of a given size." The commonest way of measuring this pile is by its quantity and thus the notion of "coverage" evolves, calling for the student to be exposed to a certain number of traditionally important periods and writers. Such a "plan," Booth observes, ignores all concern with skills, with attitudes, with judgments, perceptions, or theory, and concentrates instead only on factual detail. But "coverage" and an accumulation of quantifiable facts is a conveniently statistical way of measuring "progress" (and makes tests easy to grade), and a systematic way of arranging courses in a catalogue, and thus is conformable to traditionalist views. The trouble is that such courses produce no lasting knowledge, no grasp of structure or principle, no critical or theoretical concepts, no basis for further study, but only, as Booth says, a "desperate superficiality," leaving the student forgetful of the fact and ignorant and probably disdainful of real and significant meaning. Booth's advice for this condition is instructive: we will find some more valuable principle of structure for our courses only if as teachers we are "determined to relate everything we do back to first principles about what we want our graduates to be able to *do*. If we once trick ourselves into thinking only about what we want them to *know*, we are lost." We need programs that "in effect invite the student to think about what he will do with literature and language once he has escaped the requirements."

Here indeed is the heart of the problem. Whether we like it or not the majority of students in undergraduate programs in language and literature are not aiming to become professional literary scholars, even though it is currently a part of undergraduate gamesmanship to imply otherwise. Fortunately for all of us, most of them are going into a world to do other things, be people and citizens, to hold jobs, marry, have children, and to find such truths and morality as it may be given to them to find, to participate for good or ill in the common weal or woe of the human condition. That is what our students will do, and it is this doing that must figure in decisions about curricula, programs, examinations, even to the content and procedures of our teaching of individual courses.

These remedies, however, run counter to the increasing specialization of academic disciplines. While this fact is sometimes condemned, it is so clearly the fashion that sympathy for such broad aims as these, or for general education or interdisciplinary courses which might implement them, is difficult to raise. Robert Pooley points out that such courses are not widely given and rarely succeed, partly, one imagines, because to be well taught they require a breadth of knowledge and imagination greater than that possessed by most teachers of literature. Nor is development of these general skills on the part of a department member likely to be encouraged or to render an individual valuable in a parochial departmental view. Departments rarely support such efforts and individ-

uals undertake them at their own risk. Pooley wishes it were otherwise, and calls for English departments to take up the burden of liberal and humane studies because there is no one else who can.

> By choice or necessity most English departments today are colleges of the humanities in miniature, offering an enriched curriculum. This breadth of opportunity and responsibility is not always fully recognized and appreciated. While the corpus of English literature from Chaucer to Hardy will remain an important section of the English field, it can no longer be looked upon as the *raison d'être* of the department. The English department is now the purveyor of Western culture to the great mass of undergraduate students.

One does not know whether to applaud these aspirations or weep their frailty. It is not, to say the least, consoling to find that Western culture and general education are to be left to the mercies of departmental politics and organization: Booth hopes for assistance in combatting specialization from an "active and aggressive" dean who will enforce breadth upon departmental chairmen and protect undergraduates from professionalism. But it is naive to think that the feudal hegemonies of departmental organization with their mutually pleasing desire for autonomy for each and rigid boundaries among them, will tolerate a leader with contrary ideas.

The fact that departments of literature and philosophy are less and less interested in rallying students and faculty to the special and traditional aims of the liberal arts has another cause as well. These essays show the degree to which literary and humanistic study has acquired the bias of our more successful scientific colleagues—the assertion of the purity of our study and researches, the need to deny them as having value beyond themselves. Even though we sense the doubt that students and society as a whole have of the relevance of literature to anything which is important, we shrink from ideas which propose to relate literature to extra-literary matters. Donald Gray, for example, writing about articulation between high school and college courses rejects the suggestion of Jerome Bruner that literature courses might be constructed around conceptions of tragedy or causality because such questions "are not unique to literature, and therefore the methods and principles by which they can be studied are not necessarily part of the peculiar procedures of literature or of the peculiar discipline of its study." And: "However beneficial courses in English [in high school] may be in promulgating the ideals appropriate to democracy and producing literate citizens to serve it, their fundamental purpose is to engage students in a study worth undertaking for its own sake."

But what, as Samuel Butler once asked about art, what is literature that it should have a sake? And, for that matter, what is wrong with democratic ideals or with enlightened literate citizens? And how are we to rescue the study of literature from the defensive parochialism of such views? It is his address to this problem that makes the essay by Murray Krieger on "The Discipline of Literary Criticism" the most valuable part of this collection.

It is difficult to give full justice here to Krieger's argument as he states it, because it is itself a summary of positions which he has worked out over a number of years, and which he has stated more fully elsewhere. Briefly his claim is that all literary judgments, indeed, all observations of the external world are influenced by the state or condition of the observer-critic. Such dispositions are inherent in the act of perception itself. By requiring us to test our attitudes and opinions for their theoretical soundness, to recognize contradictions, and to

acknowledge the degree to which our notions of literature are or are not rigorous and exact, theoretical criticism can make us aware and conscious of these predispositions. From this basis, criticism can become the "queen of the literary sciences" and provide methodological accuracy not only for specific literary judgments, but for inquiries into questions of organization of curricula, of teaching, indeed to all literary activity, both scholarly and pedagogical.

Krieger proceeds with care. As a latter day contextualist he has sufficient respect for the work itself as the ultimate "repository of meanings" to allow us to use the extra-literary impulses which radiate from the work. He values close reading and formalist analysis as restraints against simpleminded impressionism and relativism. But having grasped the work itself, criticism can guide and control the instrumental uses of literature, thereby rescuing literature from its isolation from social and moral concerns. "The critical theorist," Krieger writes, "can remind us that . . . literature and criticism can give us what might be called knowledge, even if it is not of the would-be scientific sort that the philologist used to aim at." He can move "beyond criticism by allowing to the work a peculiarly literary influence on the march of cultural forces and ideologies." He can, in short, provide that needed reinstatement of the cognitive function of literature that the romantic critics of the last century required, and which traditionalist and formalist critics have tended to deny.

Reforms of this kind, however, face formidable obstacles from traditionalist and establishment positions, and these are nowhere stronger and less open to change than in graduate education, and are reflected with perverse clarity in the discussion of graduate programs by Roger McCutcheon. Here is the worst of the old school: the prescriptive gentleman's system, narrowly cultivated, clubby, and based on a conception of liberal studies as irrelevant to the real world as it is basic to the practice of most departments of English. McCutcheon for example sees things as in a decline in a day when even teachers' colleges are giving Ph.D's. The rest of us, therefore, must fight these tendencies by keeping standards high, which seems to mean that every student should experience sufficient pain, tedium and intellectual dullness in his graduate study, so that if he prevails through it all, his loyalty if not his intelligence is beyond question. McCutcheon is accordingly suspicious of any modern techniques of information retrieval which may make the regimen of extensive factual examinations less relevant and the student's life less dismal. Simplified bibliographic methods are suspect because they deny the student the full measure of the salutary pains of librarianship:

> Reliance on our new bibliographical resources should not keep us from practicing the searching that was at one time necessary. Tedious though it was, the diligence required to turn through the relatively unindexed periodicals, had from time to time its rewards. Like the rulers of old Ceylon, we made unanticipated discoveries. This serendipity is not likely to be achieved by researchers who rely solely upon accretions of our present-day bibliography.

But defenses of tedium and bibliographic serendipities are not going to seem very important or attractive to an imaginative and creative intellect, and faced with this system such a mind will soon leave the study of literature to those whom such difficulties may satisfy.

McCutcheon is not worried about teaching because in common with those who justify research he claims that "the disciplines of graduate school promote virtues essential to good teaching," although this begs the question of what

good teaching is. His ideal graduate student is to be crammed with facts and coverages; he needs "more than an encyclopediean knowledge; he needs a cultured disciplined taste, and competence in coverage and perception, plus an understanding of scholarly method." He does not, apparently, need to know anything about the students he is preparing to teach, about the world they are going to live in, nor the world of ideas beyond his own speciality.

McCutcheon is not alone among these writers in his neglect of the arts of teaching. The particular problems of teaching the humanities, the kinds of questions being raised by educational theorists are both ignored. There are sufficient reasons why the profession should restrain its enthusiasm for the suggestions of Bruner and John Holt, but their work is of sufficient merit and has been successfully implemented at lower levels to deserve more than incidental mention. Nor do these essays recognize with sufficient candor the political realities of departmental organization and administration. Educational problems so often turn out to be (like social problems in general) political problems. Rogers' chapter on these matters has the virtue of recognizing difficulties, but we need attention also to modes of persuasion and political action which reform and progress require.

Finally, it is perhaps the saddest fact of all that in a collection of essays on the teaching of English, sponsored by the most important and prestigious organizations of teachers, on a subject which involves year after year hundreds of thousands of undergraduates, there is no chapter devoted to students themselves.

We need not merely console ourselves with the identification of problems. Beyond the ideas of change and progress mentioned are other moments of truth-saying which deserve special mention. One especially so, as much for the position of its author as for its content: "For the gravest and most dangerous self-deception that we in college English have been guilty of is in regarding 'research' as our true vocation and sloughing off teaching and the preparing of teachers as necessary evils. . . . We simply cannot justify our advanced study by its contribution to practical knowledge." This is John Hurt Fisher, one of the editors of this volume, and Executive Secretary of the Modern Language Association which publishes the weightiest and most scholarly of learned journals.

This truth, that our faith cannot be justified by our works, is the truth which calls much of what we do into question. It is a truth which those outside our narrow parish have seen, and which has justifiably relegated our discipline and the values which it should represent to the shabbier byways of the academic and intellectual world. Scholarly volumes of accumulated fact, however laboriously collected and however articulately presented, provide little solace and less wisdom in a world which spins on, fearfully toward destruction, in a world where technology presents us daily with the necessity for decisions which even the best educated face unprepared. If teachers of literature continue to have little effect on these matters it will be because we have continued to fiddle preciously, leaving our poets and seers, both past and present, isolated from the world's affairs and irrelevant to its problems.